

CAREER GUIDE FOR DENTAL ASSISTANTS

SOC Code: 31-9091

Pay Band(s): 2 and 3 ([Salary Structure](#))

Standard Occupational Description: Assist dentist, set up patient and equipment, and keep records.

Dental Assistant positions in the Commonwealth are assigned to the following Roles in the [Direct Service Career Group](#):

[Direct Service Associate II](#)

[Direct Service Associate III](#)

While Dental Assistants within the Commonwealth are all located within the Direct Service Career Group, individuals may want to pursue other opportunities within the Commonwealth depending upon individual training, education, knowledge, skills, abilities, and interests.

Other Career Group(s) that may be of interest are:

[Health Care Technology](#)
[Laboratory and Research Services](#)
[Administrative and Office Support](#)

SKILLS, KNOWLEDGE, ABILITIES AND TASKS

(Technical and Functional Expertise)

Skills

Note: *The technical and functional skills listed below are based on general occupational qualifications Dental Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the skills listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.*

1. Giving full attention to what other people are saying, taking time to understand the points being made, asking questions as appropriate, and not interrupting at inappropriate times.
2. Understanding written sentences and paragraphs in work related documents.
3. Talking to others to convey information effectively.
4. Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do.
5. Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions.
6. Understanding the implications of new information for both current and future problem solving and decision-making.
7. Performing routine maintenance on equipment and determining when and what kind of maintenance is needed.
8. Managing one's own time and the time of others.
9. Teaching others how to do something.
10. Determining the kind of tools and equipment needed to do a job.

Knowledge

Note: The technical and functional knowledge statements listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Dental Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the knowledge listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.

The **Knowledge** of:

1. Information and techniques needed to diagnose and treat human injuries, diseases, and deformities. This includes symptoms, treatment alternatives, drug properties and interactions, and preventive health-care measures.
2. Principles and processes for providing customer and personal services. This includes customer needs assessment, meeting quality standards for services, and evaluation of customer satisfaction.
3. Structure and content of the English language including the meaning and spelling of words, rules of composition, and grammar.
4. Administrative and clerical procedures and systems such as word processing, managing files and records, stenography and transcription, designing forms, and other office procedures and terminology.
5. Chemical composition, structure, and properties of substances and of the chemical processes and transformations that they undergo. This includes uses of chemicals and their interactions, danger signs, production techniques, and disposal methods.

Abilities

Note: The technical and functional abilities listed below are based on general occupational qualifications for Dental Assistants commonly recognized by most employers. Typically, you will not be required to have all of the abilities listed to be a successful performer. Recruitment and selection standards for an individual state job must be based on the specific knowledge, skills, and abilities for that job as indicated in the job announcement and job description in the Employee Work Profile.

The **Ability** to:

1. Communicate information and ideas in speaking so others will understand.
2. Listen to and understand information and ideas presented through spoken words and sentences.
3. Communicate information and ideas in writing so others will understand.
4. See details at close range (within a few feet of the observer).
5. Arrange things or actions in a certain order or pattern according to a specific rule or set of rules (e.g., patterns of numbers, letters, words, pictures, and mathematical operations).
6. Speak clearly so others can understand you.
7. Keep your hand and arm steady while moving your arm or while holding your arm and hand in one position.
8. Identify and understand the speech of another person.
9. Read and understand information and ideas presented in writing.
10. Tell when something is wrong or is likely to go wrong. It does not involve solving the problem, only recognizing there is a problem.

Tasks

Note: The following is a list of sample tasks typically performed by Dental Assistants. Employees in this occupation will not necessarily perform all of the tasks listed.

1. Prepare patient, sterilize and disinfect instruments, set up instrument trays, prepare materials, and assist dentist during dental procedures.
2. Expose dental diagnostic x-rays.
3. Record treatment information in patient records.
4. Take and record medical and dental histories and vital signs of patients.
5. Provide postoperative instructions prescribed by dentist.
6. Assist dentist in management of medical and dental emergencies.
7. Pour, trim, and polish study casts.
8. Instruct patients in oral hygiene and plaque control programs.
9. Make preliminary impressions for study casts and occlusal registrations for mounting study casts.
10. Clean and polish removable appliances.

INTERESTED?

Like people, occupations have traits or characteristics. These characteristics give important clues about the nature of the work and work environment, and give you an opportunity to match your own personal interests to a specific occupation. When you choose a job in an occupation that matches your own interests you have taken an important step in planning a successful and rewarding career.

The characteristics for the Dental Assistant occupation follow:

Social — Social occupations frequently involve working with, communicating with, and teaching people. These occupations often involve helping or providing service to others.

Realistic — Realistic occupations frequently involve work activities that include practical, hands-on problems and solutions. They often deal with plants, animals, and real-world materials like wood, tools, and machinery. Many of the occupations require working outside, and do not involve a lot of paperwork or working closely with others.

Enterprising — Enterprising occupations frequently involve starting up and carrying out projects. These occupations can involve leading people and making many decisions. Sometimes they require risk taking and often deal with business.

LICENSURE, REGISTRATION, OR CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Most States regulate the duties that dental assistants are allowed to perform through licensure or registration. Licensure or registration may require passing a written or practical examination. States offering licensure or registration have a variety of schools offering courses—approximately 10 to 12 months in length—that meet their State's requirements. Many States require continuing education to maintain licensure or registration. A few States allow dental assistants to perform any function delegated to them by the dentist.

Individual States have adopted different standards for dental assistants who perform certain advanced duties, such as radiological procedures. The completion of the Radiation Health and Safety examination offered by the Dental Assisting National Board (DANB) meets those standards in more than 30 States. Some States require the completion of a State-approved course in radiology as well.

Certification is available through DANB and is recognized or required in more than 30 States. Other organizations offer registration, most often at the State level. Certification is an acknowledgment of an assistant's qualifications and professional competence and may be an asset when one is seeking employment. Candidates may qualify to take the DANB certification examination by graduating from an accredited training program or by having 2 years of full-time, or 4 years of part-time, experience as a dental assistant. In addition, applicants must have current certification in cardiopulmonary resuscitation. For annual recertification, individuals must earn continuing education credits.

In Virginia dental assistants are not licensed or registered. They are required to complete training and be certified to work with x-rays. A dentist may delegate duties to a dental assistant based on the training and experience possessed. Licensing information for dental professions can be found on the Department of Health Professions web site at <http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/>

EDUCATIONAL, TRAINING, AND LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Information provided by the Department of Labor, Bureau of Statistics follows:

Dental assistants perform a variety of patient care, office, and laboratory duties. They work chairside as dentists examine and treat patients. They make patients as comfortable as possible in the dental chair, prepare them for treatment, and obtain their dental records. Assistants hand instruments and materials to dentists and keep patients' mouths dry and clear by using suction or other devices. Assistants also sterilize and disinfect instruments and equipment, prepare trays of instruments for dental procedures, and instruct patients on postoperative and general oral health care.

Some dental assistants prepare materials for impressions and restorations, take dental x-rays, and process x-ray film as directed by a dentist. They also may remove sutures, apply topical anesthetics to gums or cavity-preventive agents to teeth, remove excess cement used in the filling process, and place rubber dams on the teeth to isolate them for individual treatment. Those with laboratory duties make casts of the teeth and mouth from impressions, clean and polish removable appliances, and make temporary crowns. Dental assistants with office duties schedule and confirm appointments, receive patients, keep treatment records, send bills, receive payments, and order dental supplies and materials.

Dental assistants should not be confused with dental hygienists, who are licensed to perform different clinical tasks.

Most assistants learn their skills on the job, although an increasing number are trained in dental-assisting programs offered by community and junior colleges, trade schools, technical institutes, or the Armed Forces. Assistants must be a second pair of hands for a dentist; therefore, Dentists look for people who are reliable, can work well with others, and have good manual dexterity. High school students interested in a career as a dental assistant should take courses in biology, chemistry, health, and office practices.

The American Dental Association's Commission on Dental Accreditation approves dental-assisting training programs. Programs include classroom, laboratory, and preclinical instruction in dental-assisting skills and related theory. In addition, students gain practical experience in dental schools, clinics, or dental offices. Most programs take 1 year or less to complete and lead to a certificate or diploma. Two-year programs offered in community and junior colleges lead to an associate degree. All programs require a high school diploma or its equivalent, and some require science or computer-related courses for admission. A number of private vocational schools offer 4- to 6-month courses in dental assisting, but the Commission on Dental Accreditation does not accredit these programs.

Without further education, advancement opportunities are limited. Some dental assistants become office managers, dental-assisting instructors, or dental product sales representatives. Others go back to school to become dental hygienists. For many, this entry-level occupation provides basic training and experience and serves as a steppingstone to more highly skilled and higher paying jobs.

The Virginia Area Health Education Center Program provides the following information:

Educational Institutions in Virginia that offer educational programs for dental assistants include the following: Applied Career Training, Buchanan County Technology & Career Center, Chantilly Professional Center, Chesterfield Technology Center, Columbia Technology School, Dental Careers of Tidewater, E.C. Glass High School, J. Sargeant Reynolds Community College, Kee Business College, Medical Careers Institute, Medical Learning Center, Norfolk Technical Vocational Center, Old Dominion University, Richmond Technical Center, Spotsylvania Vocational Center, Tidewater Tech., Virginia School of Dental Assisting, Virginia School of Technology, Washing County technical Center, and Wytheville Community College.

COMMONWEALTH COMPETENCIES

Competencies are a set of identified behaviors, knowledge, skills, and abilities that directly and positively impact the success of employees and the organization. Competencies can be observed and measured. When consistently demonstrated, competencies make employees particularly effective in their work. Competencies help lay out a road map to career success. You can use the Commonwealth Competencies to help improve your individual performance by adopting behaviors that make high performing employees successful in their jobs. In this way, you can use the Commonwealth Competencies for your further professional development.

The Commonwealth Competencies are:

1. Technical and Functional Expertise
2. Understanding the Business
3. Achieving Results
4. Serving the Customer
5. Teamwork
6. Interpersonal and Communication Skills
7. Leadership and Personal Effectiveness

The above competencies may be applied to employees throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. They can be rank-ordered by agencies and hiring managers to represent the needs of

a specific job. The rank ordering will change depending upon the occupation, an organization's priorities, the actual job requirements, and the supervisor's preferences.

Career success is both about what you do (applying your technical knowledge, skills, and ability) and how you do it (the consistent behaviors you demonstrate and choose to use) while interacting and communicating with others. Hopefully, by studying the Commonwealth competencies, identifying your developmental opportunities, and working to refine your own competence, you can take charge of your career!

For additional information about the **Commonwealth Competencies** go to: http://jobs.state.va.us/cc_planningctr.htm. For the competencies, we first list the competencies and then define each. Finally, we list competency indicators; to describe what successful performance looks like.

COMMONWEALTH CAREER PATH

Career opportunities in the Commonwealth are not limited to moving “up” to the next highest role and pay band, changing positions, or to becoming a supervisor. That’s because most roles describe a broad group of occupationally related positions that perform a range of work that requires increased knowledge and skills. For that reason, Commonwealth roles describe the career paths within the same or higher-level role for the same or different Career Group. The broad salary range and the Commonwealth’s pay practices provide flexibility in recognizing career development and advancement. ([Salary Structure](#))

For example: **Dental Assistants**

PAY BAND	PRACTITIONER ROLES
2	Direct Service Associate II
3	Direct Service Associate III

PAY BANDS	MANAGER ROLES

Sample Career Path

Direct Service Associate II

The Direct Service Associate II role provides career tracks for health care support technicians, such as Dental Assistants and others who perform health care support responsibilities ranging from entry-level to journey-level. Duties are varied, requiring either knowledge in a variety of areas or specialized knowledge to perform tasks in assigned specialty areas.

Direct Service Associate III

The Direct Service Associate III role provides career tracks for Dental Assistants and other health care support specialists that are either service delivery experts or supervisors. As service

delivery experts, employees provide or lead specialized services that support the work of interdisciplinary treatment teams, licensed clinical staff, and professional counselors. As supervisors, employees supervise other Direct Service Workers, develop staff schedules, evaluate staff performance, serve as members of interdisciplinary treatment teams, make minor changes in treatment and program plans, write reports, make oral presentations, and review client records for appropriate documentation.

ADDITIONAL OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT:

O*NET (Occupational Information Network)

http://online.onetcenter.org/gen_search_page

Virginia Employment Commission

<http://www.alex.vec.state.va.us/>

Career One Stop

<http://www.careeronestop.org/>

Virginia Career Resource Network

<http://www.vacrn.net/>

Department of Health Professions

<http://www.dhp.virginia.gov/>

The U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics

<http://www.bls.gov/>

Virginia Area Health Education Centers Program

<http://www.ahec.vcu.edu/>

Professional Organizations

Virginia Dental Association

<http://www.vadental.org/>

American Dental Assistants Association

<http://www.dentalassistant.org/>